The death of Adam

Father Leonardo Castellani, SJ

When the oldest of men died, he knew that God had forgiven his guilt; and also that, in a certain way, that guilt was irreparable; from which he drew the inevitable and dark consequence, which stood before him like a wall of shadow.

*

His eyes filled with tears, which flowed for hours on end, teardrop by teardrop. Upon his pile of wild hides, before his final evening, which fell immense and clear, amidst his children of all ages who had come from all parts of the world, he who had given names to all things, remained silent. In a tremendous, wordless utterance, Fallen Man asked God for the re-creation of Man. All things seemed distant to him, and he felt God as something more resistant and hard than all things.

*

Eve, bowing, rested her head upon his knees and said, “Adam.” And he felt her as strange and distant; his children were already strange and distant to him. Silently, all the hirsute patriarchs watched: Seth, the second Abel, and his son Enos, who invented public worship; Mahalahil, who invented the wheeled chariot; Jared, the hut-builder; the second Enoch, who walked with God, and his son, the gentle Methuselah, a man like a child; Kaiman, Lamech, and Noah. Some of Cain's children had gathered, wary: Jahel, father of those who live in tents, and Tubal, the inventor of the harp and the horn, with Naamah, Tubal-cain's sister. Cain, the wandering, black patriarch, father of those without land, was missing. All flesh corrupted its way.

*

Nine hundred and thirty times the four seasons had passed over his gray head; he had seen the birth of the son of the twelfth son of his second son, the First Dead, since the Lord had clothed him in skins and he had fallen into the terrible convulsions of the illness that never left him.

*

Adam reviewed with immense pain in his mind the vertiginous descent of humanity, of those human swarms that now teemed everywhere until they were lost from sight; and his turbulent thoughts tormented him like the unbearable spasms of his old illness.

*

He saw his second son dead at his feet, and he knew the abominable sin of Lamech. He contemplated the strange ways of the sons of Cain and their rash inventions; they had begun to kill sheep and eat their flesh, instead of merely shearing the wool and offering it as a smoking sacrifice to the Creator; He thus obtained a shorter, more aggressive, and tumultuous life; he knew that a group of them sustained themselves by raiding their brothers' possessions, pillaging and killing with sharp bronze clubs. A new curse had arisen in the thorny earth, yet it was contained within the curse of woman: "I will multiply your pregnancies," and within his own: "The earth will yield thorns to you"; a horrible collective fratricide that he had named "war." He saw men driven mad by it, neglecting the knowledge of God, sharpening their intellects to create instruments of domination. He felt his heart faint with anguish, because he, his divine mission strayed, was the cause of it all. Man wanted, in any case, to be lord of the universe. His children, without God,

sought to reconquer Paradise. The black earth, young and ardent, yielded with an ambiguous smile to their efforts like a fertile and treacherous lover.

*

They were already talking of building a tower that would reach the heavens, incited by Lamech, the builder of stone walls, son of Jabal, who was son of Zillah, who was son of Methusael, who was son of Mehuhalah, who was son of Irad, who was son of the first Enoch, who was son of Cain in the land of Enoch, east of Eden. They were already talking of building a single, immense city with bronze gates that would gather all men, willingly or by force. They had many wives and fought to the death for them. They built clumsy imitations of the Law. It was already impossible to stop all of this, the consequences of a single sin, the infallible developments of the infinite pride of wanting to be like God without God.

*

He also knew how the Law miraculously endured; He knew that in dozens of bivouacs, the ceremony he had inaugurated on the night of Abel's death was repeated every night by the light of the patriarchal fire: the ritual and faithful repetition, performed by the Father and murmured by the listeners, of the Narrative of the Origin, the Genealogies, the Four Great Commandments, the Four Great Truths, and the Seven Things the Lord Hated. But that long, sacred chant, preserved like a river in its stony bed, within the dancing chains of the stanzas of the oral style, how many hearts it found dormant! And already appearing were the clumsy imitations or reckless innovations they called the Little Laws.

*

Only he could freely invent within the graceful necklaces of sacred language; but already they were repeating it badly, omitting passages, and then freely commenting on it with opposing interpretations. He knew, however, that there the word of the Lord was contained in the animalistic, human form.

*

He longed to see God. His pain reached its peak. It was night, true night, a night without sleep or awakening, from which he would fearfully set foot on an unknown threshold, just as he had stood on the solemn threshold of Paradise on the day he sprang forth from the earth. He remembered his first exclamation: **“I AM!”**; his second exclamation: “**FROM WHERE?**”; his third immense exclamation, which enveloped him like a wing of fire: **“OH CREATOR!”**, after which he heard God and received the **Three Gifts**. What would the New Revelation be in a moment?

*

The **Three Jewels** were lost forever: **immortality, essential sanctity, royal integrity.** They were like three free jewels from a crown, like three layers of celestial varnish, like a triple transparent robe of otherworldly light; but when they were torn from him, he felt as if his very skin were being taken with them; he was left more than naked, stripped bare. From then on, he eagerly spied for the birth of his first child, conceived in the tumult, in the frenzy, and in the anger. He wanted to see if God would create a new Adam, if He would renew His strange wager. He knew it could not be. It was not, indeed.

*

When he received, kneeling beside the moaning woman, that formless, bloodied worm, still attached to her; When he beheld the pitiful sketch of the most helpless animal, more powerless than a sick mole, scarcely more than a plant, he knew that the Three Divine Gifts were a unique and capricious present, not bestowed upon him personally, but upon the species within him; and that they would never be repeated, for all that is Supreme is always One. Before that ridiculous miniature of humanity, clumsily moving, he felt the sting of irreparable loss and challenged God to make a new Adam, greater than himself, not for his sake, but so that the unclean serpent would not prevail; while the woman, brought back to life, zealously gathered and sheltered the offspring in her womb.

*

Adam now repeated his challenge, now a plea. He felt that God did not reject him; he recognized the august signs of Adoration. Having been the perfect and luxurious work of God's hands, now broken, he knew that nothing like it could be made, and he did not know how it was possible to make anything better; But he also knew that the Serpent must be vanquished. He gathered all the pains he had suffered and those he had seen suffered; and with an immense effort, he placed them upon his head and offered them to God. He stretched out his arms lengthwise on the earth in a gesture of supplication, brought his feet together, and groaned. Traversing all of future time, he offered himself to the Almighty with all the sorrows of humankind, a man of sorrows, knowing what sickness is. Like the immense night filled with stars, like the august and bitter calm of the sea, like a smoking mountain motionless on its broad throne, the First Man spoke with God; and his children heard only his sobs in the darkness. Suddenly, the sobs twisted into a single death rattle. And a great silence fell.

*

They gathered the remains of him who had never been born, but simply existed, and buried them deep in his mother's earth, according to his will, in the place he had designated; in the place where one day another Being, who had always been, twice-born, was destined to shed all His blood for all who are born.

*

Fr. Leonardo Castellani, Universal Sacred Doctor.

***